



Strategies that Succeed

Stories from the SAGE Project

4. Community Action Planning: Women in Mali Want Girls' Mentoring

Every evening, the girls of Manabougou in grades one to four gather in the house of the village chief to do their homework. For one hour, the chief gives them a lesson in prayer and in reading the Koran, and then for the next two hours, the girls do their school lessons. Two local women are available to assist them and supervise their studying. These regular group studying sessions are the result of a community-generated action plan to help girls stay in school.

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Girls' enrolment and retention rates are strikingly low in Mali, but through the assistance of the SAGE project, communities such as Manabougou are developing community action plans for improving girls' education. Implemented by the Academy for Educational Development, SAGE has been

working in five countries (Guinea, Mali, Ghana, El Salvador, and the Democratic Republic of Congo) to develop multisectoral partnerships in support of girls' education. Since March of 1999, SAGE Mali has addressed inequities in educational access, retention, and achievement for



Happy to be attending school!



Manabougou fifth grade students.

were trained between May 2001 and September 2001.

Community Action Planning in Manabougou

Manabougou is a small village 50 km from Bamako, the capital city of Mali, and is located in the Koulikoro region of Mali. Manabougou receives assistance from a local NGO, the

girls by undertaking the following activities:

1. A curriculum revision to include life skills from a gender perspective,
2. Leadership training for female PTA members,
3. Girls' mentoring and life skills program,
4. Girl-friendly classroom practices,
5. Development of community action plans for girls' education.

SAGE community action planning advances girls' education because it assists communities to frame their needs in a more coherent fashion and to develop strategies that facilitate the solution-seeking process, and ultimately improve children's, especially girls',

schooling, retention, and achievement rates.

Activities identified in the community action plans include girls' mentoring, adult female literacy for mothers, income generating activities to subsidize school fees for girls, awareness raising, and advocacy efforts.

Action planning has been undertaken in 51 communities, with the active involvement of more than 600 community members. Of the 51 communities, the SAGE Mali staff directly trained six communities on a pilot basis. An international partner organizations, Africare, trained an additional 45 communities. The six SAGE Mali communities

Malian Association for the Development of the Sahel (AMPROS), which in turn is affiliated with World Education.

During the community action plan training in Manabougou, analysis of girls' and boys' education indicators revealed the following: 1) In 1996, 37% of girls and 56% of boys of school going age entered first grade. Of that number only 19% of girls and 40% of boys remained in school in 2000-2001. 81% of the girls dropped out or repeated lower grades versus only 60% of boys.

After presenting these statistics to the 26 participants of the community action plan training, the participants discussed the

indicators of girls' education and underlying causes of low schooling rates. The following issues emerged:

- Low schooling rate overall
- Even lower schooling rate for girls
- High dropout rate for girls (As noted by the indicators given above, even though there are high drop out rates for girls and boys, girls' drop out rates are even higher.)
- High repetition rate for girls

The underlying causes identified were:

- School fees
- Parents' lack of awareness of the advantages of girls' schooling
- Parents' lack of schooling
- Parents cannot monitor their children's assignments at home because the parents themselves have not, in many cases, been to school
- Early marriage
- The burden of household chores on girls

During a large group discussion, an additional important cause was mentioned. Sometimes teachers beat students very severely, causing them to miss school or drop out altogether.



Participants in a SAGE Community Action Planning workshop in Manabougou.

SAGE then asked the community members “Where would you like to see your community in the next few years?” The members stated that they wanted their community to be developed, provide education for all children, and begin income generating activities. SAGE then assisted the Manabougou community participants to develop their five-year action plan based on these visions.

For example, the participants detailed their vision, “education for all”, in greater detail and listed activities necessary to reach that vision. One suggestion introduced by SAGE Mali in addition to the ideas put forth by the community, was a girls' mentoring activity. To free up time for their

studies it was decided to organize girls into groups in order to accelerate the completion of domestic chores. Studying would also be undertaken in groups, under the supervision of a grown-up. At first, the villagers were unsure whether this activity would be successful in their community but after some discussion decided they would include it in their action plan. The commitment of the community organizers, the leadership shown by the village chief and the success of the group studying sessions are a testimony of the relevance of this activity.

Final Note

When SAGE Mali returned to Manabougou after several months to monitor implementation of the commu-

nity action plan, they found that the girls' mentoring activity had been a resounding success. Not least because it is an example of an intervention that can easily adapted and driven by the community and requires very few resources. By facilitating the learning and action taking process SAGE enabled one community to marry old and new educational practices in order to advance girls' education.

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